

REMARKS

This amendment is in response to the Final Office Action mailed November 17, 2006. Claims 19, 27, 32, and 33 have been amended. Claims 1-6, 8, 9, 11-17, and 19-34 are presently pending. No new matter has been added.

Claims 19, 27, 32, and 33 have been amended to return those claims to their earlier form prior to the last amendment (dated August 30, 2006). In the immediately preceding Office Action (dated May 30, 2006) claims 19, 27, 32, and 33 were rejected over a combination of references including U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0009592 to Stahura (“Stahura”). As described in more detail below, Stahura is not prior art because Stahura was filed after the present patent application and does not claim priority to any earlier patent application. Accordingly, there was no need to make any amendment to overcome the rejection of these claims in the 5/30/06 Office Action.

Furthermore, the amended claims 19, 27, 32, and 33 do not necessitate an additional search because the amended claims have been considered earlier and were the subject of an earlier search. For these reasons, the Applicant respectfully requests entry of these amendments.

§103 Rejections

Claims 27, 28, and 32-34 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,774,170 to Hite et al. (“Hite”) in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0126597 to Darby et al. (“Darby”) and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0009592 to Stahura (“Stahura”). Claims 1, 2, 4-6, 8, 14-17, 19, 21-23, and 26 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hite in view of Darby, Stahura and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0026351 to Coleman (“Coleman”). Claims 29-31 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hite in view of Darby, Stahura and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2001/0025377 to Hinderks (“Hinderks”). Claims 9, 11-13, 20, 24 and 25 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hite in view of Darby, Stahura, Coleman and Hinderks. Claim 3 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being

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unpatentable over Hite, Darby, Stahura and Coleman and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,177,931 to Alexander ("Alexander"). The Applicant traverses these rejections.

Each of the present claims is rejected over a combination of prior art which includes Stahura. Stahura, however, is not prior art to the present patent application. The present patent application was filed on June 14, 2001. Stahura was filed on July 5, 2001. The filing date of Stahura is after the filing date of the present patent application. Stahura does not claim priority to any earlier patent application. Accordingly, Stahura is not prior art because it was filed after the present patent application. For this reason, all of the present claims are patentable over the cited references. The Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the rejections of these claims.

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in immediate condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue. If the Examiner has any questions or concerns, the Applicant encourages the Examiner to contact the Applicant's representative, Bruce Black, by telephone to discuss the matter.

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Respectfully submitted,

By Jamie Wigand for
Bruce E. Black
Registration No.: 41,622

DARBY & DARBY P.C.
P.O. Box 5257
New York, New York 10150-5257
(206) 262-8900
(212) 527-7701 (Fax)
Attorneys/Agents For Applicant